"A"-1q-13

The actual living standard, although considerably lower than 511
in any peace-time year before World War II, is not so low as to cause general unrest. The Hungarian economy, however, rests on a precarious foundation and a poor crop year can ~~shoot~~ BRING the living standard down considerably below normal. This was the case in 1953 when the Berlin rioting and the unrest resulting from a widespread drop in agricultural and industrial production forced the Communists to introduce the "New Course" and to shift the economic stress from heavy industry to consumer goods.

Delinquency, begging and vagabondage are practically non- 735
existent in Hungary, or at least they are not noticeable because the 738
police are carefully rounding up those who seem to have nothing to do and putting them to work on various public projects. No reliable figures on criminality are available. Judging from the court columns 687
appearing in the daily newspapers, however, one gets the impression that "crimes against socialist property" are quite frequent--the pilfering of materials or, more seldom, tools, from the workshops, and fraud in the administration of socialized industrial or agricultural concerns. Articles thundering against the workers' tardiness or failure to deliver grain are another commonplace in the newspapers. [461]

The poverty of the country prevents the development of 000

517 chiefly history books, if we can get them. Books are treasures.
212 Generally the children get them from people who are interested in us. There are students in Budapest who sometimes organise libraries on wheels. Last year this library let us have a book by Tolstoy for a week—*War and Peace*. We could not read the whole of it. We gathered in Uncle Andras's house, all the adult population of our cluster of huts, and we took turns reading aloud. It was winter, and we read four hours every evening, so that we had only three and a half hours' sleep. It was wonderful. We asked the students to send us a book about our history, so that we should be able to keep it. They sent it to Uncle Andras. He had to go a long way for it—to the village post office. But they did not give him the book, but told him to go to the gendarmerie. There they boxed his ears and hit his feet with sticks. "This is to teach you not to ask for books from the city, you old socialist swine." So, you see, it is quite difficult to get books.

517 Mostly we have no oil for our lamps. So we just talk. Old people talk about their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. They generally begin like this: "He was a very poor man, grandfather Janos was, rest his soul", as if it were an unusual thing to be very poor.

We talk. The young folk play around a bit; they go walking
837 or sing for themselves. There are always a few young men about
566 who are sulking because their girl is being "used" in the manor or by someone belonging to the estate-management staff.

Because the fact is that our women-folk *are* "used" by our lords, estate-managers, their assistants, and even by the overseers. We belong to them, don't we? It is quite natural that if they want to use our girls they simply say, "You, Julcsa or Terka, come round this evening." And they naturally go. Some young estate assistants are nice about it and say, "Come in, Julcsa, to darn my socks"; but they generally simply tell them to come in.

The girls don't talk about this. They get some wine and sometimes a piece of bacon. Next day they are tired. But they work just the same. If they are a bit slack, the assistant rebukes them: "Do you think you can be slack just because I used you last night?" Then the girl blushes. So they work even harder next day so as not to be shamed.

566 Well, after dinner we live our private life. Let us suppose that
●735 it is summer. Harvest time. The *puszta* is quite lively. The landworkers are here. We, the serf-servants, are not enough to do the harvest, so every spring the bailiff of our lord goes away to hire harvest gangs.

He goes to far-away places, to the east and north of the country

of our lords. (We, the serf-servants, live mostly in the western half of Hungary, the country of huge estates.) 566 735

He goes away—goes from village to village and looks over the harvest-gangs. In the spring the land-workers are a pretty poor lot. They eat up everything they have made during the previous season. They live on the outskirts of villages, in huts for which they have to pay money. They are pretty weak by the spring. Some of them are so desperate that they even spend the contract-money, which is dangerous for them. For it is the custom, when the harvest gang makes a contract, for every person to put two to five *pengœs* into his labour book. This money belongs to the bailiff. Most bailiffs don't take on people who give them no money. Or, if they are lucky, the bailiff gives them an advance on their wages so that they can pay him his money.

So the harvest-gang are here. They have just arrived to-day. First they get a month's pay in advance. This they send home immediately, so that their families shall have something to eat. They generally ask for the second month's advance too, so that they can eat. And then they *do* eat. They sit in the stable of the oxen, which is their home while they are with us. The *csiras* take the oxen to their summer home in the distant fields, and the harvesters get their place. They sit in the huge stable on their bunks of straw and eat. For this first evening the estate generally provides a few candlesticks so that they can see and get accustomed to finding their bunks in the dark. We of the *puszta* stand in the doorway and look on while they eat.

The harvest-gangs which visit us differ greatly. Some of them are a lively, light-hearted lot—the harvesters are always young people—some of them are grim and serious. But they are all lean and starved-out.

As we look at them eating, we remember the poems of our great poet, Sandor Petöfi, about the dogs and the wolves. The dogs are whipped by their masters, they are kicked about, they never have a minute to rest, they are not free, but they always have somewhere to sleep, and their masters throw them some food. The wolves are haunted by cold and starvation, but they are free.

We, the serf-servants, are the dogs. The land-workers are the wolves. And now these young wolves eat.

The stable is divided into the men's part and the women's part. There is a law about the duty of the estates to provide separate quarters for men and women. So the bailiff puts a wooden board at the entrance to the stable with the legend: "Men to the right, women to the left".